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Charles F. Ared

WELLS AND PALM TREES

Cool water and abundant rest
on Life's rough way

BY

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In Memoriam
Mary J. L. McDonald
TO MINE
MEMORIAL

To

Arkell Roger McMichael, M.D.

in

Gratitude and Affection

977853

CONTENTS

		PAGE
1.	Twelve Wells and Seventy Palm Trees . . .	1
2.	The Folly of Growing Old .	25
3.	Hand in Hand with God .	49
4.	The Transfigured Threat .	73
5.	With Christ at Home . .	101
6.	The Reproach of the Glad New Morning . . .	127

TWELVE WELLS AND SEVENTY PALM TREES

"And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells and three score and ten palm trees; and they encamped there by the waters."
—Exodus 15 : 27.

A WRITER of our own day, from whom once we expected much, has told us in a delightful little essay what comfort these words brought one day to his jaded soul. "Rising this morning," he says, "for no reason that I know of, in the worst of spirits, and looking gloomily out across an expanse of sunlit gorse and heather that should have gladdened any grateful soul, indifferent to the lark and spiteful towards the cuckoo, I took a Bible down from my shelf of

bed-books, and, opening it at random, read: 'At Elim are twelve wells and seventy palm trees!' From that instant, no doubt illogically enough, my spirits began to lift; and all through the day, whenever they momentarily fell again, 'Never mind,' the sweet old words kept whispering, 'at Elim are twelve wells and seventy palm trees!'"

The text is taken from the story of the Exodus—the story of the march of the people of Israel across the desert toward the promised land. The Red Sea once passed, Pharaoh's host destroyed, with the free airs of the wilderness blowing upon them, the Israelites moved bravely onward toward their place amongst the empires of the earth. Within three days terror had them by the throat. From the sands of flame through which their feet dragged heavily sprang up a burning thirst; and when at last an oasis shone

before them green and cool, and hope lent them wings, they found the water brackish, undrinkable, and they called the place *Marah*, which means bitterness, for bitter was the water to their taste and bitter the disappointment to their soul. The narrative goes on to tell how Moses sweetened for them the bitter water, and then their next camping ground was Elim; and there they found twelve wells and seventy palm trees—cool depths of shade and abundant rest. Here our essayist misunderstands the story. He thinks that Moses revived the drooping souls of his followers by telling them of Elim, as they flung themselves down upon the withered grass at Marah in despair. He pictures them marching with their heavy burdens through sandy wastes, with parched lips and aching limbs, but bracing themselves for persistent effort with the hope of Elim, saying to

one another as each was ready to faint by the way: "At Elim are twelve wells and seventy palm trees"—the very words "full of cool water and cool shade." There is no such picture in the Bible story. It is a prose-fancy. Very different might their march from Marah to Elim have been had they possessed any such inspiring hope. Yet our author's mistake does but make more interesting and significant the fact that he himself derived such comfort from the mere words and the sound of them. For, as he himself says, "For all we know, the wells of Elim are long since dry, its palm trees withered, its very name forgotten; and to us of another name and civilisation the very symbolism is unfamiliar, we who go not to wells for our water and have never seen a palm tree. Yet such is the emotional impressionability of words, such their power of transmit-

ting sincerity of feeling across time, that those simple words of cool water and cool shade vibrate still with their old exquisite refreshment of promise; still speak, like spring water in the eager mouth, of quenched thirst and the whisper of leaves; still make a mirage to the mind of the mysterious mossy walls of old wells, the delicious plash and echo, the sleepy sunlight—quenched thirst and all the great green rest!" And wonderful indeed, as he adds—and this is the moral of it all—wonderful is the comfort of words: "It is not in what the words say; for the most comforting words are often the most irrelevant. It is something in the fall of the syllables, in the flower-like face of the words"—in the sound and not in the sense which the analyst and the grammarian say they ought to have.

A little reflection will prove this

true out of our own experience. The witchery of words has possessed us all at one time or other, though we have not allowed ourselves leisure to explain their fascination. Perhaps if we gave ourselves to such inquiry we should find that the meaning and message of the words found us, though we knew it not; that it was not only the magic of sweet sounds that won and held us: there was a noble thought set to noble and appropriate music, and it was the soul of the sweet old words that came to our own souls with glad uplifting power. Did you ever try to understand that Hebrew imagery of the word fitly spoken? It is like, says the proverb-builder, apples of gold in pictures of silver; by which he means, like the orange upon his tree looking out of the silver bloom. For "fitly spoken"—which may or may not be a graphic rendering; you are the judge

—the margin of the Authorized Version suggests, "running on wheels." And the meaning is that a sentence so admirably spoken, so perfect in its sincerity, its completeness, its literary charm and felicity, running swiftly, smoothly, and easily to its mark, is fair as the golden fruit of the orange tree with its tracery of silver spray.

We know those words that run on wheels, that run on their own wheels, and go straight to their home in our heart. There are sermons which are the absolute despair of the preacher who is so unfortunate as to read them —by Phillips Brooks, let us say, or by Henry Ward Beecher. Having read those sermons, their texts are for ever lost to us. All that could be said has been said, and said so well that no man could dream of attempting to say it in any other way. To say these things now would be theft! To say

anything else would be folly! These words run on wheels.

And there are glorious sentences, lines, texts, which come to us in their stern admonition of duty and tune our thoughts to the heroic pitch; or come to us in the hour of brave resolve, gather to a point and focus the diffused aspiration of our manhood, and set it ablaze with determination; or find us amid chill and gloom and foreboding, if irrelevant, fear, and leave us careless, free, and gay, like rippling wavelets on a summer sea. Tennyson, who has given to the world so many of these grand words on wheels, words whose running the world will not willingly let stop, describes them as "jewels five-words long, that on the stretched forefinger of all time sparkle for ever." And that man or woman is poor indeed who does not keep a secret store of such jewels—diamonds and rubies

and sapphires and all manner of precious stones—whose darting and flashing rays serve to break up the blackness of the darkest night and make it beautiful.

The temptation which doth now so easily beset the preacher is to illustrate his theme with chosen specimens of jewels five-words long, of words that run on wheels to human hearts, that are full of the plashing of Elim's wells and the shade of her seventy palm trees. But then the sermon would become no more than an un-indexed catalogue of favourite quotations from all literature! And that sermon would never end. What is our debt, the debt of the least literate amongst us to our own Tennyson and Browning, to go no further; to Lowell and Whittier, if you will; to Wordsworth, Burns, or Shelley; and the debt which will never be paid on earth to Shakespeare's self?

You can set yourselves, if you like, to imagine the English language, to imagine conversation, common speech, rhetoric and eloquence suddenly denuded of every grace and strength lent to it by the soul of Shakespeare. You may try to imagine the result if you will; no pointed phrase, nor compact, trim sentence; no dash of quaint salt humour; no splendour of ocean cadences in grand set speech—none that Shakespeare's mind conceived and framed—and I wish you joy of your task. For myself there is only a Shakespeare sentence to describe it: "Chaos is come again!" And what would our own hidden life be, that of which we do not speak, but in which all the springs of action are, without the spiritual re-charging of our souls by the faith of Tennyson, the daring of Browning, the trust of Whittier, the humanity of Lowell, the defiance

of Shelley, the manliness of Burns, and the healing power of Wordsworth, God's enduring gift to the English-speaking race?

What then shall we say of Bible texts and Bible messages? We laugh at the pin-and-prick divination of our pious ancestors. We have only a smile for John Wesley's superstition. In a time of difficulty or stress he would take down his Bible, insert a pin wherever it might happen, open the page there and read, according to the day of the month the corresponding number of the verse, and find revealed for him God's will for that day or circumstance. "What folly!" we breathe, and pass on. Thou blockhead! we have not yet settled how many angels can dance on the point of a needle; and dost thou call divinity to a pin-point? God, we thank Thee that we are not as this poor Wesley, prophet

of God and saviour of the centuries! But we need to remember that there are two ways of reading the Bible. One is for devotion; and there context, origins, and grammar matter little. The other is for criticism, knowledge, understanding, and the building-up of a large and rational system of interpretation. In this day we are not likely to lose sight of the critical, the historical, the literary study of the Bible. The theory to which we stand committed, on the truth of which depends the value of much of our work, is that the better the Bible is understood the more it will be loved; that the profoundest results of criticism produce the deepest fruits of devotion; and that in so far as the *mind* of the Bible speaks to our minds, to that degree its *heart* and *soul* will speak to our own. Let no ignorant half-knowledge falsify that theory in your life. It is the painful

prerogative of the young, the gifted, and the ambitious, having just opened their eyes to the mystery and splendour and light of all this wonderful world, to believe themselves, as perhaps they are, the prophets of a new age and the children of a nobler inspiration. They have only begun to see the kingdom and the power and the glory which older eyes have looked upon and by which their souls have lived. So they believe themselves divinely called to preach what they think is the Faith of To-morrow, which, alas! on examination too often proves a second-hand copy of a sleepy edition of the Gospel of yesterday afternoon! What Whittier said, and we have quoted a thousand times, a million times is true:

> "Weary seekers of the best,
> We come back laden from our quest,
> To find that all the sages said
> Is in the Book our mothers read!"

With all your getting of knowledge from all corners of the earth, borne on all winds of heaven, get understanding of this, that the highest in the Bible literature is as high above the highest in all other literature as the highest in Shakespeare, Dante, Homer, is above the ephemeral productions of the daily press. This, and not that, is pre-eminently and permanently a light to our feet and a lamp to our path. And the answer to the question "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" remains, and ever must remain, "By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word!"

What deathless memories spring up and catch us by the heart as we set our fancy free amongst the Bible texts which have made us what we are! Waking memories gleam like hill-tops touched with sunrise. There was a time when we questioned the provi-

dence of God; when the night gathered, and there was no light of sun nor any star. Then the Bible word came to us: "Though clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne." "Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart." Baffled in enterprises of Christian service, it was the Bible word that told us: "They who sow in tears shall reap in joy"; "He who goeth forth weeping bearing precious seed shall without doubt come again with rejoicing, bringing in his sheaves." So we went forth, not in tears, but in tried and triumphant faith, knowing that, whether it was for us to reap in joy or to find that "one soweth and another reapeth," yet while "Seedtime and harvest shall not fail," one day "Sower and Reaper shall rejoice together." Foiled, depressed, out-

worn, and all but ready to let the brutal world take its way, we made our appeal from earth to heaven, and though our words were not graven with an iron pen upon the face of the rock for ever, yet our cry pierced to the heart of the Eternal, "I know that my Vindicator liveth, and that He shall stand at last over this dust; and though worms destroy my body, yet without my flesh shall I see God." And when cold and pain and weakness wrapped us round, and all the energies of our manhood were exhausted in the unending struggle, we fell back upon the bosom of omnipotence, and "as one whom his mother comforteth," we heard the whisper, "The Eternal God is thy dwelling-place, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms."

Do you not remember a time when your world went mad for war, and you

steadied your soul for faithfulness with the Bible promise, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the Sons of God"? When you tried to feed the fires of social service, love the unlovely, touch pitch without being defiled, and search amid the ooze and slime of city streets for jewels for the Redeemer's crown, what was your inspiration but the Bible truth, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me"? The love that was in your heart could not save you from all bad men's hate. It hissed and raged around you, defaming and defacing on every side. But loud above all roar of tempests, high above the oaths and curses of the streets, the stillest, smallest voice which ever breathed in human conscience whispered, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your

heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And in a day more drear, and a more memorable year, when you stood beside the deepest grave you ever digged, and thought you had lowered into its darkness all that was left to you of joy on earth, the word which flung the sun back again into the broad heavens, gave wings to your faith and immortality to your love, was it not, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; He that liveth and believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"? And as you remember these things, and things still better than these, unspeakable things which it is not lawful for man to utter, you are persuaded that "The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed." You find it true beyond all measure, bound or limit of human speech that "Christ in you is

the hope of glory." And in that blessed assurance you go forth to all that life has in store for you, a smile on your lips, high courage in your heart, carrying your head as is fitting to a child of God, finding that "All things are yours," that "Christ is yours," and "God is yours," and that "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ!"

So the sweet old words about wells and palm trees have carried us far. Is it not marvellous that in this civilization, so different from their own, under conditions of life separated by wildernesses and by oceans from theirs, these words should flow over us and bathe us in their consolation and their joy? How strangely spirit speaks to spirit through all these changing years! When an English poet finds brooding satisfaction in the thought that

"No life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never,
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea,"

his pose of morbid melancholy is rebuked by the masters of his own craft who are not dead but alive, breathers of an ampler day, heralds of a larger and an indestructible life. It is Wordsworth who sees and says,

"There is
One great Society alone on earth:
The noble living and the noble dead."

It is Tennyson who declares,

"The sun, the moon, the stars,
Send no such light upon the ways of men
As one great deed."

And it is George Eliot who prays,

"Oh, may I join the Choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence; live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge men's search
To vaster issues. So let me join the Choir invisible,
Whose music is the gladness of the world."

Well, then, believe it true! In some way the unknown man who wrote of twelve wells and seventy palm trees has projected his thought through all these ages, and he speaks to us yet. He will go on speaking to men while human thought runs through the cycle of the centuries, and footsore, heart-stricken travellers, over antres vast and deserts idle and over the dusty highways of life, will yet find comfort in the thought that on before,—oh, always on before, —Elim is waiting, and at Elim are twelve wells and seventy palm trees. These poor murmurers did not know it. They murmured too soon. Had they only known! With what eagerness they had tightened the belt, stiffened the shoulders, set the nerves at a strain, in fond imagination lapped the cool water over their blackening lips, and cheered the way they journeyed with a hero's song! Then learn the

lesson of it, brother; go thou and do likewise!

Do you tell me that life is too hard for you, its burdens too heavy, its disappointments too sore? That as often as it seems that you are finding your way to a little peace, a little comfort, surer standing ground beneath your feet, you are thrown down again beneath fresh burdens of anxiety and responsibility; and you have not strength for such a life as this? Do you tell me of the cruelty of such realized weakness amid the calls of this busy world? And do you think I do not know without your telling? Oh, have I not shared such hopes? Do I not know the bitterness of defeat? But believe me, comrade, "At Elim are twelve wells and seventy palm trees!" Do you tell me of the bitterness of hope deferred? Do you tell me that you are weary of praying and yearning and loving? What solicitude you have

shown for the sinner so near to your heart who will not repent of his sins; for the prodigal who will not come home! It is all useless, do you say? But "At Elim are twelve wells and seventy palm trees!" Or is it that you are losing faith in the heroic movements which incarnate the great redemptive pity which is in your heart? The King is so long in coming; why tarry the wheels of His chariot? And once again I say to you, "Fight on, thou brave true heart; the cause thou fightest for, in so far as it is just, is very sure of victory." And for yourself, nerveless, dispirited, ready to faint by the way — courage, brother, *Elim* is not far away, is not very far from any one of us. And at Elim — are twelve wells and seventy palm trees!

THE FOLLY OF GROWING OLD

"We all do fade as a leaf."—Isaiah 64: 6.

WE all do fade as a leaf? Indeed, but I wish we did! Autumn is beautiful, with a beauty all its own, not to be exchanged by one who knows the secret of the woods for the nascent glories of the Spring. Dean Hole, the man who loved the roses, and whom the roses trusted with their inmost thoughts, once wrote to me: "And you are going to New York in September! I envy you. You will see the Central Park in the Fall, the most beautiful sight on earth, and the unimaginable

glories of the Hudson banks!" But neither the Adirondacks nor the Ardennes, nor the land of the cypress and myrtle, nor the brooks of over-quoted Vallombrosa, enjoy monopoly of Autumn's loveliness. English eyes have feasted and English hearts have thrilled in Cheshire lanes and groves, as those of our brother-Scot in the land of the mountain and the flood. In the autumn days, a thousand browns and yellows chase each other up the forest slopes, "shade deepens over shade, from wan declining green to sooty dark." Gold and olive rustle overhead, and slowly circle through the waving air. Ruddy as with heart's blood are the fallen leaves, and the bracing airs that tell of coming frost bring us "nobler cares than listless summer knew." Could we all fade as does the leaf, as peacefully, with such happy, sweet content, min-

istering as richly to the heart of this old world, the prospect of lengthening years, on which the shadows fall, would be lit up from within by gladness and by hope!

But we see people grow old, and we feel that the prospect of fading is ugly, distasteful, hateful. There are limitations which are natural to youth but distressing when they last into middle life. There are moods and manners, simple and pleasing in the dawn of life which are discreditable in maturer years. There are faults which were pardonable in our young manhood which are disgusting in age. There are sins, too, which sat easily upon us when we floated gaily down the stream of life, youth on the prow and pleasure at the helm. In part, our youthful vivacity and buoyancy disguised their nature. Sometimes, the frank joy of living hid them altogether.

And in other qualities of our attractive nature, in those strong sunny days, there was something to counterbalance these defects, to compensate for light and passing faults. So we thought: "light" and "passing." But the years have shown that if light they were not passing. They have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength. And now as Time delivers his persistent attacks on heart and brain, and the graces and attractions of past years no longer cloak our failings, these sins grip us more tightly, assert themselves and their power over us, show how ugly is the Autumn of our days when we fade—but not as does the leaf!

Byron once said,

> "So, for a good old gentlemanly vice,
> I think I must take up with Avarice!"

That vice serves admirably for illustration, because it may be only the deg-

radation of an originally wise and good resolve. In your early days you are thrifty, economical, sensible in your dealings with money. You are not mean; but you recognize the supreme necessity, in such a world as this, of paying your way and putting by something for a rainy day. And so, with commendable forethought, you endeavour to lay a little store aside,

> "Not for to hide it in a hedge,
> Nor for a train attendant;
> But for the glorious privilege
> Of being independent."

Yet no habit, once formed, grows upon you faster than the habit of acquisitiveness. It is easy to become mean. You may become a miser without knowing it, though your miser's hoards are so pitifully small. You can be as miserly with a hundred dollars as with a million. And when you have made your money by small sums and scraped

and saved painfully, you are a ready victim for this good old gentlemanly vice of Avarice. But do you realize that it is a vice? Do you see that it is as truly a vice as drunkenness or any of the sins of the flesh? You have joined hands with those who are battling against the sin of the world. You are foremost in the missions of your Church, in zeal and devoted service. You are anxious to throw around the young a net-work of holy influences which shall safeguard their ignorance from the temptations of a great city. You are trying to rescue those who have fallen in the fight. But do you realize that you, too, have fallen? That your steps have gone astray? That silently, unobserved, a cruel vice has twined round you, chained up your free emotions, made your ideals coarse and your actions poor? Your friends see it. They

talk about your dubious ways to one another. Your minister sees it. He knows that a fight has been waged in your heart by the forces of Good and the forces of Evil, and that the Good has not triumphed. It is as clear to him as if he had seen you drunk, or learned that you were leading a double life. The weakening of the moral fibre is the process of years. The changes proceed so stealthily that you are not conscious of them yourself. You think that people are not quite so cordial with you, and you know that they do not speak of you with quite the same respect: that is all. But the truth is that your soul is shriveling up. It is Autumn with you, not Autumn illumined with more than the glancing lights of May, not Autumn flushed with purple glory. But in the saddest, dreariest sense,

> "Your years are in the yellow leaf,
> The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
> The worm, the canker, and the grief
> Are yours alone."

We have preached to the young, we have always been preaching to the young. But it is to ourselves that we must preach. We must call ourselves to repentance. We must open our eyes to see the gulf at our feet, the deplorable, wrecked old age we are preparing for ourselves because we have made gold our hope and said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence. We must call back the past again. We must bring forth fruits meet for repentance. There is one that scattereth, and yet increaseth; there is one that withholdeth more than is due, but it tendeth only to want. Come, let us open our hearts again! Come, let us return unto the Lord together!

This is only one illustration. Others would serve. A critical disposi-

tion, degenerating into censoriousness and evil speaking. An uncontrolled irritability, which leaves us violent and furious men. A love of display and childish vanity, becoming vulgar ostentation, growing upon you by more and more until you are a vain, foolish, ugly old woman, ugly because you have lost that beauty which might have been conserved through the ages of the ages, the beauty of a radiant human love.

Leave the illustration and abide by the fact. Too often we do not fade as the leaf. That is the bitterness of death. We fade, but the beauty of the Fall, the Indian Summer of our life, is not there.

Yet consider how beautiful this period of life might be. Think how foolish it is to grow old, when we all might fade as a leaf, and fading, fling glories on the earth.

In these years you have reached the maturity of your powers. You have spent your years in reading, in observing, in learning, and you are the master of accumulated stores of knowledge. You are in possession of something which is not a new faculty, but which serves to render more valuable every faculty you have, without which the most aspiring genius lacks a gracious somewhat—the priceless thing we call Experience. And in addition, there are truths which can only be appreciated when middle life is reached, truths which to that extent are new, newly seen and newly felt. Consider all these four blessings: Increase of capacity; Accumulated knowledge; Experience; New truths—why, it is madness to grow old, while Autumn proffers such gifts as these! Surely, we have exaggerated the joys of youth! Its wild heats, its ungoverned trans-

ports, the tumult in the blood, the raw sophistries in which it delights, the crudities which it takes for gospel and the glitter for gold—who would accept these again in exchange for the wealth of learning, the trained mind, the disciplined will, the dignity of self-mastery, the command born of acknowledged successes, which constitute the glory of our Autumn days? This is what Emerson calls the "cumulative advantage in living." "All our good days," he says, "are our sponsors, who speak for us when we are silent, pay for us when we have no money, introduce us when we have no letters, and work for us while we are asleep."

Nor is this all. I have spoken only of intellectual things. But there are graces of character, too, aspects of human goodness, scintillations of the divine soul within us, attainable by us when we fade as the leaf, beautiful as

the pine forest whose base rests on the green meadow while its heights are lost in winter snows. I have pictured you falling in the worldly way, withered and mean. But I see you now, clothed upon with dignity, yet manifesting everywhere new sympathy. There is in you a gentleness adorned and set in pure relief by strength and wisdom. I find in you a considerateness made possible only by the lessons which life has taught, a sweetness of disposition, so genial, so mellow, so ripe, that all who know you feel the charm of your rich life, and all who love you see that you have walked in sunshine on the hills of God. Though modesty should forbid you say it, yet the words of one of the noblest of the Hebrew poets shall be true of you:

"When I went forth to the gate unto the city,
When I prepared my seat in the broad place,
The young men saw me and hid themselves,
And the aged rose up and stood;

For when the ear heard me, then it blessed me,
And when the eye saw me, it gave witness unto me;
Because I delivered the poor that cried,
The fatherless, also, that had none to help him.
The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me:
And I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
I was eyes to the blind,
And feet was I to the lame.
I was a Father to the needy:
And the cause of him that I knew not, I made mine own."

And you shall say with one of the most religious of Englishmen,

"What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, or glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind."

This is a lesson for those who walk in the Spring-time, whose feet tread upon daisies. Let no evil habit seize upon you while you are young, to triumph over you when you grow old.

Let not your present gladness lay up stores of future sadness. Do nothing to-day which will make you shiver when you think of to-morrow. See, I have set before you mental decrepitude and spiritual beggary, and an age of dignity, beauty, and love. Therefore, choose life, that you may live!

And herein we may find the promise of renewed life for us all, when this bodily life has failed us. The real life which we have chosen, life of knowledge, power, gentleness, immortality, which has ripened in the Autumn days on earth, prophesies to us all a grander life where everlasting Spring abides and never-withering flowers. This is the parable of an Autumn morning, as interpreted by the author of "Lorna Doone":

"Then the woods arose in folds like drapery of awakened mountains, stately with a depth of awe, and memory

of the tempests. Autumn's mellow hand was on them as they owned already, touched with gold and red and olive; and their joy towards the sun was less to a bridegroom than a father. Yet before the floating impress of the woods could clear itself, suddenly the gladsome light leaped over hill and valley, casting amber, blue, and purple, and a tint of rich red rose according to the scene they lit on, and the curtain flung around; yet all alike dispelling fear and the cloven hoof of darkness, all on the wings of hope advancing, and proclaiming 'God is here.' Then life and joy sprang reassured from every crouching hollow; every flower and bud and bird had a fluttering sense of them, and all the flashing of God's gaze merged into soft beneficence. So perhaps shall break upon us that eternal morning, when crag and chasm

shall be no more, neither hill and valley, nor great unvintaged ocean; when glory shall not scare happiness, neither happiness envy glory; but all things shall arise and shine in the light of the Father's countenance, because itself is risen."

We need the comfort and hope of this prophecy. For the fading will come. And there are aspects of it which will demand all our philosophy, all our religion, if we are to confront them bravely.

We shall deny that time is rolling on, as long as we can. We shall tell ourselves that we have entered into a contract with the Old Man with the Sickle, by virtue of which he shall turn his attention to all our friends and neighbors before he knocks at our door. It is true that there are indications that we are likely to have grounds of action for breach of con-

tract. We do not see quite so well as we did; but they go in for such wretched type nowadays, and the electric light is greatly over-rated. We do not hear quite so well; but people have formed such an abominable habit of muttering: not one man in fifty opens his mouth and speaks his words plainly. And we cannot sit down to dinner with the fine recklessness of a hereafter which belonged to us in the days when good digestion would wait on appetite and health on both; but, then, cooking really seems to be a lost art, and people will serve a lot of kickshaws instead of a wholesome, substantial meal! And so forth, and so forth, and so forth! But things are as they are, and their consequences will be what they will be: so why should we deceive ourselves?

And some of us set ourselves to assume a youthfulness when we have it

not. We play at being young again. We adopt every modern invention and "improvement" to disguise the fact to ourselves and to other people. We try to look young and only succeed in looking ridiculous.

And others of us, more unhappy still, seek to lift ourselves out of the limitations which Nature imperiously fastens upon us. We are ready to break through a hedge, though a serpent should bite us. We try to sing the song of the open road, when shades of the prison-house close around us. We are prepared to break through the restraining influences of order, of civilisation, of morality, to prove that we are still young, and free citizens of a world to which we do not belong.

But a more excellent way show I unto you. Do not grow old! It is a foolish thing to do.

Live with young life. Surround

yourselves with young people. It is a sovereign panacea for many of the ills which flesh is heir to. Time and time again when I have marvelled that so-and-so is so "young looking," I have been told, "Yes; but you see she always has a number of young people with her." It would not surprise me to be told that there is some physiological law at the back of it all! Water finds its level, even if it has to run up hill to do it. Nature loves an equilibrium, loves nothing better than striking an average and balancing accounts. Perhaps she has a whim for equalising the quantity and quality of the flow of life through the veins of those who commonly associate together. Perhaps it is her way to share up the vitality of a small but loving crowd. She says to the older folks, "Bring knowledge, wisdom, secured character"; and to the young ones,

"Bring over-flowing vitality, never-resting energy, young blood that pulses with the joy of life"; and then to them all, "Pool your assets! Socialise your souls! Hold the energy of life in common health and common wealth!"

Live with young life, I repeat, if you would not grow old. You who are fathers and mothers, make friends with your own children. It will be a revelation to some of them that you are such *good fellows*—yes, both of you, father and mother, too! You are a father or a mother—true; and a very decent father or mother, I don't doubt! But try being friends with them as well. Let them find their happiness where you find yours. Or, when they begin to find joy outside, let them delight in bringing it to you for you to share it! Verily, I say unto you, you shall have your reward. You shall

grow young again in their youth. Father shall say to mother,

> "And when by envy Time transported
> Shall strip our days of half their joys,
> You in your girls again be courted,
> And I'll go wooing with the boys!"

Live in the hopes and ideals of youth. This is the time of aspiration, of vision, of daring. Then we mount with wings as eagles. We think, we plan, we dare, we leap to the majesty of infinite things. Oh, for your life, my brother, do not scoff at the radiant visions which our young men see! Weep, rather, and beat your breast, and pray to God to renew a right spirit within you, if you yourself can neither see visions nor dream dreams. But unless you would end your days a petulant, cynical, bitter old man, let no sneering Mephistopheles tempt you to laugh at the glowing hopes which flood a younger, nobler soul. Have

we carried society and the nation, have we carried civilisation and international life, to such a position of commanding justice and abiding peace, that further progress is unthinkable? If those who are growing up picture in their dreams an ideal commonwealth, and in their speeches seem to suggest that the ideal needs but the work of their hands to become actual, touch the vision lightly, treat it with becoming reverence. Is the religious life of the Churches so pure, so holy, that nothing more Christlike can be conceived? And if God teaches wisdom by the mouths of babes and sucklings, do you, who are wise and prudent, fear as you would fear the seven deadly sins together, the offence which casts a stumbling-block in the way of Christ's little ones. Share, I bid you, share these deathless hopes. Keep your heart young. And mock at threatening Time.

Live in activities, consecration, heroism. My dear Madam, your playing at precedent with your next door neighbour is poor sport for a child of God. Do you no longer believe in immortality? And you, my friend, when you have made your money: what good will it be to you, if you have unmade yourself? Live in ideal thinking. Live in unselfish service. Live in generous sympathy. Live in mighty movements for the redemption of the world's heart from the slavery of sin. Live outside yourself. Live in God. Live in Christ, and in the power of his Resurrection—and the older you grow the younger you will be!

"Old,—we are growing old:
Going on through a beautiful road,
Finding earth a more blessed abode;
Nobler work by our hearts to be wrought,
Freer paths for our hope and our thought:
Because of the beauty the years unfold,
We are cheerfully growing old!

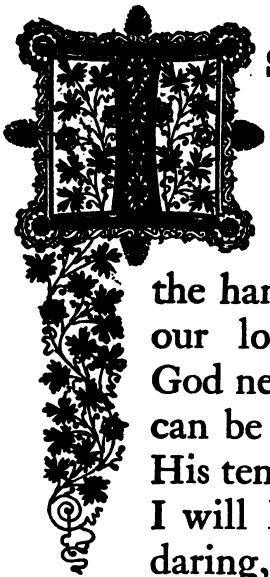
Old,—we are growing old:
Going up where the sunshine is clear;
Watching grander horizons appear
Out of clouds that enveloped our youth;
Standing firm on the mountains of truth:
Because of the glory the years unfold,
We are joyfully growing old.

Old,—we are growing old:
Going in to the gardens of rest
That glow through the gold of the west,
Where the rose and the amaranth blend,
And each path is the way to a friend:
Because of the peace that the years unfold,
We are thankfully growing old.

Old,—are we growing old?
Life blooms as we travel on
Up the hills, into fresh, lovely dawn;
We are children, who do but begin
The sweetness of living to win:
Because heaven is in us, to bud and unfold,
We are younger for growing old."

HAND IN HAND WITH GOD!

"For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."—Isaiah 41:13.



ISAIAH is very bold. He promises that the hand we throw up in weakness and helplessness shall be caught by the hand of omnipotence. In our loneliness we shall feel God near. The silence which can be felt shall be broken by His tender whisper, "Fear not; I will help thee." It is very daring, for our prophet has but now exhausted the splendours and sublimities of inspired rhetoric in his endeavour to describe the majesty of God. His sentences are a living glory.

They rise unbidden to our lips when our hearts would fain employ the noblest strains of praise. God is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. He calleth all the stars by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking. He is the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He fainteth not, neither is He weary; there is no searching of His understanding. To Him the nations are as a drop of a bucket; they are counted as the small dust of the balance; He taketh up the isles as a very little thing! And all this God is all our own. And He it is, in the amplitude of His power, in the infinity of His majesty, who will hold our right hand and say, "Fear not; I will help thee."

This suggests a question. We often ask, Are you man enough to commit yourself to the cause of Christ? Are you strong enough to take the side of right when right is miscalled wrong? Dare you stand for truth amongst men who delight in this world's falsities, who love and make a lie? Can you stand fast in the freedom with which Christ has made you free, when all your world is entangled in a yoke of bondage to fashion and passion and sin? In a word, we ask, how good a man dare you be?

That is good, and such questions have their place and value. But must we not ask another?

Are you strong enough and big enough and brave enough to dispense with religion and its help? Can you do without God? Are you so certainly the master of your fate, the captain of your soul, and are you so confident that

you always will be, that you can afford to despise or ignore the eternal promises of God?

What is your life? It begins, says the pessimist, in a cry of pain, and it ends with a sigh of relief. Youth, says the brilliant statesman, novelist, cynic, is a blunder, manhood a struggle, old age a regret. I repudiate these descriptions of human experience. I thank God for the pleasure that our happy lifetime gives. I bless the Giver of all good for the mirth and the laughter of our days. But, doing so, I know too well "what thorns lie in every path; what sighs, what sorrows, and what tears lie between a mother's arms and death's embrace," what multitudinous conflicts and buffetings of fortune wait for every one of us before we come to the last fight of all, the last and the best, to make light of man's need of a God. And when I ask you: Can you

face it all without religion? The answer which I offer is: How foolish of you to try! Here is comfort in every sorrow, companionship in all loneliness, power for the re-vitalisation of every drooping energy, courage, inspiration, and immortal hope. Being what you are—men, and not heroic monsters of flawless perfection—it is madness and folly to spurn the out-stretched hand of God.

Consider this matter well, and you will find yourselves in sight of a solution of the outstanding problem of human history. How does it come about that some men accomplish so much, while we, made of the same flesh and blood and human spirit, not so greatly inferior to them in mere capacity and knowledge, live on at this poor dying rate, and pass away—sparrows, indeed, that have flown out of the darkness behind into the light of

the camp-fire for a moment, and then out to the darkness behind? Men like ourselves, women such as you, have subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, turned aside the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war with the vested interests of evil, turned to flight armies of threatening foes. Of them the world, as they found it, was not worthy; but they left it worthier for their living. Tell us, ye students of history and of men, wherein their mighty strength lay! And among ourselves, too, do you think it is sheer weight of brain, or vigour of blood, or breadth of education that conditions our achievements or dooms us to sterility—strength which may be simple brutality, brain-power which may be nothing but selfish cunning, and culture to turn our

literature into license and our arithmetic into roguery? Science does not build men. One man of large learning may scientifically cure a fever or invent a safety lamp, while another scientifically blows up a city or poisons a nation. All depends on what you do with your science when you have it! The secret of life lies deeper than this. Like the secret of the Lord, it is with them that fear Him. And the mightiest strength of man is reserved for him who walks hand in hand with God.

In the dawn of history Abraham abandoned the star worship and nature adoration of his fathers in ancient Chaldea, satisfied that the Judge of all the earth would assuredly do him right, and that the God of the heavens was his exceeding great reward. Moses, the man of God, organised the most far-reaching and tremendous revolt of a slave-race against bondage and des-

potism which universal history records, and changed the face of the world. Samuel laid the foundations of a kingdom, not by might nor by power, but in the conviction that to obey was better than sacrifice, and to hearken to God's word better than the smoke and incense of ritual things. In this spirit Peter and John considered that they had not to hearken unto men, but unto God, and flung open the gates of the kingdom of heaven to the lowly and the poor. In this spirit, too, Paul turned in disdain from the beggarly elements, dead letters, and old things of a religion grown mechanical, to the glorious gospel of the blissful God, to a salvation wide as all human life, deep as all human need, assuring for the race in the far-off consummation of God's eternal purposes a future of unimaginable splendour which should outshine the golden glory of its dawn.

The men of the next generation, called to be a kingdom and priests unto God, as far as the east is from the west carried the news of a Saviour's death, of life and immortality brought to light in His gospel, and planted the banner of the Cross on the topmost pinnacles of the pagan world. Poor men, unlettered men, without human resources, earthly influence, wit and wisdom or wealth, did these things, God choosing the weak things of this world to confound the strong and bring His mighty kingdom in. Francis of Assissi left home, comfort, wealth, and friends, vowing himself under that star-lit Umbrian night to woo his "sweet bride Poverty," and be true to her till death. Francis Xavier sought to fill up what remained of the sufferings of Christ, living and dying for them that sat in darkness and the shadow of death. And how should I tell of Cromwell,

with his pathetic plea, "Oh, how good it is to close with the Lord betimes"; Milton, of gift and faculty divine, learning in his blindness that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, that they also serve who only stand and wait; Bunyan in his filthy den in Bedford jail, seeing visions and dreaming dreams which have cheered and saved and inspired millions of earth's children; or of Wesley, Whitefield, Howard, Raikes, Clarkson, Wilberforce, Garrison, Elizabeth Fry, Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler, Catherine Booth, George Müller, Barnardo, Moody, General Booth, or of one in a million of those numberless unknown heroes as great as the greatest heroes known, who have acquitted themselves as men and women sent of God, and not so much possessing Him as possessed and filled by Him? Ask the secret of their strength;

it is in God. And these all are what they are, and they have done what they did, because they knew that whatever happened the Lord their God would hold their right hand; and each one heard Him say, "Fear not; I will help thee!"

Listen to this letter from Huss to a friend, written in prison, while daily expecting his condemnation:

"I write this letter in prison, and with my fettered hand, expecting my sentence of death to-morrow. When, with the assistance of Jesus Christ, we meet again in the delicious peace of the future life, you will learn how merciful God has shown Himself towards me—how effectually he has supported me in the midst of my temptations and trials."

And here is another letter from a prison cell, a letter from Samuel Rutherford—not to be confounded with the

"Mark" of "Tanner's Lane"—the Covenanter before the Covenant, the stern old Calvinist and Presbyterian imprisoned in Aberdeen by the bishops:

"They have sent me to this prison to feast with my King. The bridegroom hath run away with my heart; I am drowned over head and ears in His love. We children of the bridechamber have cause to leap for joy, for we have gotten the bridegroom's love ring, and the marriage supper is drawing nigh. O time, run fast! O sun, hasten on the banquet! I wonder what the marriage-supper of the Lamb will be in God's dining-place of glory, since a kiss of Christ in this poor wilderness is so comforting!"

The language is strangely exaggerated, is it? And too sentimental for your taste? I agree with you. But from Constance and from Aberdeen rings loud and true the one attestation,

the attestation of faith in the God who holds their hand.

I have quoted to you names that the Christian world holds dear. But listen now to Socrates, as he stands in the presence of death:

"My friend, if you think that a man of any worth at all ought to reckon the chances of life and death when he acts, or that he ought to think of anything but whether he is acting rightly or wrongly, and as a good man or a bad man would act, you are grievously mistaken.

"Wherever a man's post is, whether he has chosen it of his own will or whether he has been placed at it by his commander, there it is his duty to remain and face the danger, without thinking of death or any other thing, except dishonor.

"Meletus and Anytus can do me no harm. That is impossible; for I

am sure that God will not allow a good man to be injured by a bad one. They may indeed kill me, or drive me into exile, or deprive me of my civil rights; and perhaps Meletus and others think those great evils. But I do not think so; I think that it is a much greater evil to do what they are doing now, and to try to put a man to death unjustly."

That is the ground we need. For our physical life we need a stable earth, a firm footing, an assured order of day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, and a reign of law. Just as certainly we need ground of assurance in a moral order, in an over-ruling Providence, an ordering and ordaining Will, and an unfailing, encircling love. We need the conviction that we are called, chosen, commanded, sent; that we have a place in God's plan; that we are part of an eternal

system, indispensable in His everlasting purpose, and only responsible for loyal and dutiful obedience to His will as far as we know it. This is strength. This is compactness for our life. This is cohesion of purpose and faculty. This is peace and rest, and calm persistence, and the joy of living. This is how we come to ourselves and to our kingdom. This is how we find our manhood and womanhood, and enter into life. This is what it is to feel that our right hand is held by God, and to hear Him say, "Fear not; I will help thee."

You have heard a Pagan saint in the hour of world-shaking tragedy. May I now quote to you, though it be in the nature of an anti-climax, a good woman of our own time who speaks her soul concerning the little worries and distractions of every day; for small troubles, as everybody knows, often

constitute a greater trial of faith and patience than big ones. It is Frances Ridley Havergal who speaks:—

"If we are always and equally ready to do whatsoever the King appoints, all the trials and vexations arising from any change in His appointments, great or small, simply do not exist. If He appoints me to work *there*, shall I lament that I am not to work *here?* If He appoints me to wait indoors to-day, am I to be annoyed because I am not to work out-of-doors? If I meant to *write* His messages this morning, shall I grumble because He sends interrupting visitors, rich or poor, to whom I am to *speak* them, or show kindness for His sake, or at least obey His command 'Be courteous'? If all my members are really at His disposal, why should I be put out if to-day's appointment is some simple work for my hands or errands for my feet, instead of

some seemingly more important doing of head or tongue?"

In the same tone speaks another good woman to good women, Harriet Beecher Stowe:—

"Talk of hair-cloth shirts, and scourgings, and sleeping on ashes, as means of saintship! There is no need of them in our country. Let a woman once look at her domestic trials as her hair-cloth, her ashes, her scourges,—accept them,—rejoice in them,—smile and be quiet, silent, patient, loving under them,—and the convent can teach her no more; she is a victorious saint!"

While the words of John Ruskin are good for us all,—

"God is a kind Father. He sets us all in the places where he wishes us to be employed; and that employment is truly our Father's business. He chooses work for every creature which will be

delightful to them, if they do it simply and humbly. He gives us always strength enough and sense enough, for what He wants us to do. If we either tire ourselves or puzzle ourselves, it is our own fault. And we may always be sure, whatever we are doing, that we cannot be pleasing Him, if we are not happy ourselves."

And, as I bring together these exhortations of the obviously great with the apparently trivial, you can understand how men and women who have worked up into a habit of their soul the practice of relating all things to God's purpose and referring all things to His will, seem to pass from the sphere of human weakness into that of the omnipotence of God. And I, at least, can understand the heroic blend of self-assertion with self-abnegation which Macaulay found in the Puritans. "The very meanest of them was a

being to whose fate a mysterious and terrible importance belonged, on whose slightest action the spirits of light and darkness looked with anxious interest, who had been destined, before heaven and earth were created, to enjoy a felicity which should continue when heaven and earth should have passed away." Their strength was what it was because the Lord their God held their right hand and bade them, "Fear not; I will help thee!"

Can we analyse and schedule and account for and label this Refuge which the oppressed have found in God? It would help us. The living truth of it would become more true, the reality more real, as more we pondered it. What is the relief, the comfort, the rest, which we find as we walk hand in hand with God?

It is the conviction that there is One who reads our motives and understands

all the facts. In an English court of justice a man whose name is known all over the world was a second time charged with a crime he had never committed. After eating his heart away in penal servitude, and seeing before him only the prospect of such another night of despair, as the Magistrate committed him, he raised his arms to heaven and cried in tones of passion, "Before God my Maker I am absolutely innocent of every charge against me." So we, in sorrows less agonising but not less real, amid injustice and wrong, have made our appeal from earth to heaven, and in our assurance of God's knowledge of our innocence we rest. In speech, we have not risen to the heights of this invocation. In spirit we have made our appeal from the conscienceless injustice of men to the abiding, deep-seeing justice of God.

It is the assurance that to one alone,

in the last resort, we are responsible. The judgment of men may be important, may do us good or harm. But finally, when all is said, all done, all lived, it is the judgment of God upon us which is alone important. Let men praise me, yet if God condemn I am lost. While he whom God acquits is indeed acquitted.

It is the conviction that there is One with whom we can hold fellowship in the silence and the darkness, One who is ever present, whose sympathy never fails. In sorrow's path we are not alone. Our hand is in the hand of God.

And it is the unshaken and unshakable certainty that somewhere, some time, in some way, God will see us vindicated! Wisdom is justified of all her children. We may be suspected, ridiculed, defamed. We are wounded by the senseless misunderstandings of life. Our honest motives

have been misconceived. With hearts full of earnest purpose we are oppressed by earth's injustice. But now He is our Salvation because one day He shall be our Vindication.

This was the tremendous assurance of Job. "I know that my Vindicator liveth, and that He shall stand over this dust. And after my skin has been destroyed, without my flesh shall I see God." Our hero asked that these great words should be engraved with an iron pen and lead on the face of the eternal rock. If they had been so engraven, time would have obliterated their message and effaced his memory. But preserved for us in the sacred volume which our mothers read and which the sagest minds love best, they are the inspiration and the strength of men's yearning, waiting hearts for ever. So is God better to us than all our hopes, greater than His promises, rich in His

glorious giving beyond all that we can ask or think.

Wherefore, brethren, I would have you seek this mightiest strength that man can find. There are hours of stress and strain, of temptation and passion, when we would have God hold back our passionate hands. There are days when this world and its pleasures are costing us too dear and when again He must hold our eager hands in His. There are times of doubt and gloom when we wonder if He is, and why He does not show Himself to be the God of love, and His clasp upon our hand is the only assurance of His presence that will help and save us. There are few of us who cannot call to mind moments in our life when the hand-grip of one we love has been all the world to us. It has been light out of darkness, peace out of pain, and all but life from the dead. I am not

thinking of the far-off feebleness of our happy childhood, though some of us will never grow so old that we shall forget what it meant to us to put our hand in that of a big brother or strong sister or father or mother, when our little troubles sent all our poor world rocking to its foundations. But everyone amongst us has known or will know the hour in which this handclasp is the dearest thing that mortality yet holds for us. There are times when we have to nerve ourselves to bear physical pain. We brace ourselves with readier, steadier fortitude because of the touch of this loved hand on ours. There are times of bodily weakness, when lingering sickness has dissipated all conventional pride of manhood and womanhood, and we are little children again, clinging to the kindred weakness which is yet stronger than ourselves, and gaining comfort

from such contact like a child in the dark. There are times when the overtaxed nerves give way, when streams of emotion too long held back sweep in floods over the crushed and tortured soul, when we could sob or scream—but for these same tender interlocking fingers and the calm strong current of life that flows through them and from them with peace and healing in its flow. And this, says the prophet, is God to you—this and more than this! God, who laid the foundations of the earth when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy, God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, God bends from out the deep and grasps your hand in His, and whispers, Fear not; I will help thee. O God,

> Hold Thou my hand:
> In grief and joy, in hope and fear,
> Lord, let me feel that Thou art near;
> Hold Thou my hand!

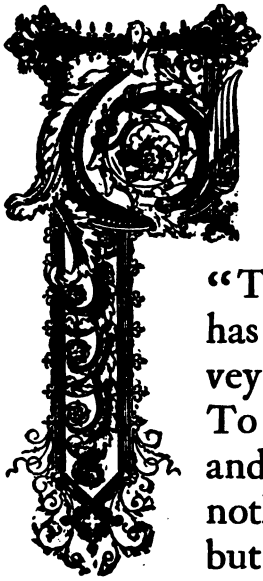
If e'er, by doubts
  Of Thy good Fatherhood depressed,
  I cannot find in Thee my rest,
Hold Thou my hand !

Hold Thou my hand:
  This passionate hand too quick to smite,
  This hand so eager for delight,
Hold Thou my hand!

And when at length,
  With darkened eyes and fingers cold,
  I seek some last loved hand to hold,
Hold Thou my hand!

THE TRANSFIGURED THREAT

"Thou art a God that seeth." Genesis 16; 13.



THIS is a text of infinite comfort. You are more familiar with it in the words of the Authorized Version, "Thou God seest me." It has been so used as to convey an unmitigated terror. To transfigure the threat and the terror we have nothing in the world to do but restore the plain meaning of the simple words and accept them as they stand. The Bible message is clear. It is the perversion of Scripture we have to fear.

These perversions of well known and perfectly intelligible passages of

Holy Writ are very curious. One strange thing about them is that they always arise amongst the class of people who profess the greatest love for the Bible, the most awful veneration for its words and letters and punctuation points, who make a special claim to orthodoxy, and are always ready to scent modern wickedness in the shape of a new theology or some other form of heresy in the religious opinions of their neighbours. But the most curious thing of all is that these perversions always—always, not sometimes—look in one direction. They always tend to darken the outlook upon the love of God and the future of mankind. They always harden Scripture. They never, by any accident, represent God as too loving, too merciful, too ready to forgive and to receive. No; but they tend to deny His love or to limit its scope, and to make of religion a forbidding thing.

Take, for instance, the Psalm of the Divine Omnipresence, Psalm one hundred and thirty-nine, the Psalm in which, according to Addison, the glorious truth of God's encompassing care is celebrated in strains of poetry as noble as can be found within the entire circle of poetry, sacred or profane:—

> "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?
> Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?
> If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there:
> If I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou art there.
> If I take the wings of the morning,
> And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
> Even there shall Thy hand lead me,
> And Thy right hand shall hold me.
> If I say, Surely the darkness shall overwhelm me,
> And the light about me shall be night;
> Even the darkness hideth not from Thee,
> But the night shineth as the day:
> The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee."

The exultation of all this thrills and throbs even through cold type. A human heart beats here, and through it course the full tides of a love divine. Yet you know how it has been used as

a threat. My earliest acquaintance with it was made when some preacher, uninstructed in the things of the Kingdom, thundered into my youthful ears the warning, intended to be startling, that if I ascended into heaven or went down into hell or took to myself wings and fled to the uttermost isles of the sea I could not get away from God's pursuing and vengeful "justice," from His determination to hold me guilty and punish my wrong-doing! And all the time the meaning of the Hebrew psalmist was precisely that of our own Whittier, in the verse which he himself regarded as his most beautiful and best,

> "I know not where His islands lift
> Their fronded palms in air;
> I only know I cannot drift
> Beyond His love and care."

The New Testament has suffered not less than the Old. How often you have heard, in sermons and prayers, a sentence purporting to come from

Paul's letter to the Romans: "That God might be just and yet the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." There is no such text in the Bible. As it is quoted, as I have repeated it, it is man's perversion of Paul's meaning and of God's own truth. It means, as quoted, that there is an antagonism between absolute justice and God's action in justifying the sinner. This antagonism was met and satisfied by the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Through that, God could be just and yet justify men. Paul never said so and never thought so. The word "yet" was not used by him. It is not in the Bible. Men who profess to consider the Bible too sacred for rational interpretation have introduced it. Paul said "that God might be just and the justifier," meaning that justice required such justification! God's justice, with which we have made so free,

demands that He should provide some way of salvation for us. It would not have been just on His part not to do it! And this is what the Apostle John meant, too, when he said, "If we repent of our sins He is faithful and *just* to forgive us our sins"—it is *just* of Him to do it. He ought! And the obligation is in His own nature. For God is love.

Other illustrations occur to me. These will suffice. Is it not time that we began to take Scripture at its face-value, to believe that inspired men said what they meant and meant what they said, and ceased to invent for God a character, harsh, unforgiving, stern, repudiated by every word of the New Testament, and nailed by Jesus Christ our Redeemer to His triumphant Cross?

Let us return to our text. You know how this text has been employed.

There is threatening in it. Terrors are in it. Children have been frightened by it. I listened to sermons from my earliest childhood to the hour when I began to preach them; and I have been reading them ever since. I have yet to hear or read a sermon on this text which is not threat, at the worst, or warning, at the best. Yet neither warning nor threat is in it. What is the story? It is there in the Bible for anybody who knows his A.B.C. to read. A slave-girl has escaped from the house of bondage which has been no home for such as she. She has suffered a great wrong and has fled from injustice and cruelty. A jealous mistress, having good cause for her jealousy, and a master who weakly consents to the torture which his wife proposes to inflict, and a life which has become intolerable—from these she makes her escape. Friendless, forlorn, alone in

the wilderness, the Angel of the Lord finds her, breathes into her soul unspeakable hopes, whispers to her the promise of motherhood, bids her believe in a splendid future for the child that is to come, and to name him, in memory of this deliverance "Ishmael" —"God heareth." And then the girl, in the new rapture which has sprung up in her heart, breathes out her glad thanksgiving in the words of our text, "Thou art a God that seeth" —that seeth Me; that seeth me in my weakness to hasten to my help; in my sore need, when there is no humanity to pity, when hope has failed me and only death remains—Thou art a God that seeth with Thine eye of love!

Can you tell me why people should want to take the heart out of a word like this, winged with immortal hope?

For this is the assurance we mortals need. Possessing it, life leaves little

else to desire, ills have no bitterness and death no sting. I wonder if I can tell you in few and simple words how it would affect our lives if this threat and terror were transfigured into the golden glory of such transcendent faith. But first let me remind you how a modern man has been able to realise it in his own life. Tennyson possessed an intellect as great as yours. His culture was as profound. He knew life. He was familiar with the teachings of science. He had absorbed the modern spirit. He had been assailed by doubt. He had fought his doubts and gathered strength, and found a deeper peace his own. And one day, late in life,—so Miss Agnes Weld tells us in her "Glimpses of Tennyson"—he was walking with her on the high, wind-swept hills beside his house when he said,—

"God is with us now on this down

as we two are walking together, just as truly as Christ was with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus; we cannot see Him, but He, the Father, and the Saviour, and the Spirit, are nearer perhaps now than then, to those that are not afraid to believe the words of the Apostles about the actual and the real presence of God and His Christ with all who yearn for it. I should be sorely afraid to live my life without God's presence, but to feel He is by my side just now as much as you are, that is the very joy of my heart."

Such a faith would bring compactness and coherence into our life. That badly expresses my meaning. I mean, in the first place, that there would be a sense of wholeness, of continuity, of purpose, rational, ordered purpose, in it. Accident would be eliminated. Chance would be an un-

meaning word. Nothing would happen too early or too late. The plan of our life, unread by us until afterward and then perhaps only in part, would be reasoned and complete. We should feel that the things which happen to us are "all right," that they are, in some strange, inexplicable way beyond our understanding now, meant for good and making for good, and we should reach the optimism which is Christianity *in excelsis*, the certainty that whatever is, is right. We should feel that "in this welter of a world we are not left to fight our own battle, nor muddle our way through as best we can, unhelped and unguided." We should possess the assurance that there is a Hand that guides.

Such a faith would inspire us with a mighty courage, courage which in every heroic age has lifted men to thrones only a little lower than that of

the omnipotence which has been its source. There is a story told of a British ambassador at the Court of Frederic the Great. The king and his statesmen were discussing the chances of war. The British representative said that "by the help of God," England would stand by Prussia. "God," sneered the king; "I did not know England had an ally of that name!" And the pretty wit was rewarded by suitable smiles. But the doughty Scotsman who represented England retorted, "Yes; and please you, Sire, He is the only ally to whom we have not to send subsidies!" He who runs may read this story of the highest courage mortal knows. Man's best ally is God. And if God be on our side who can be against us? We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

And as this faith would bring power

to us in the big, brave days when we are called upon to buckle our armour on and spend our latest breath in a war-shout in defence of the right and in defiance of the wrong, so, also, would it bring from the rich treasury of the tenderness of God comfort in every sorrow. I speak to you who have known deep sorrow. I abandon theory. I make no pretence to reason and argue, define and catalogue. I only tell you that in this belief the soul may rest. The times when I have been surest of God have not been times of prosperity and peace. No; but in times of storm, conflict, danger even, then have I been sure of God. In those times I have been able to say,

> "My heart is resting, O my God,
> I will give thanks and sing;
> My heart is at the secret source
> Of every precious thing:
> Now the frail vessel Thou hast made
> No hand but Thine shall fill;
> For the waters of this world have failed,
> And I am thirsty still.

I thirst for springs of heavenly life,
And here all day they rise;
I seek the treasure of Thy love,
And close at hand it lies;
And a new song is in my mouth
To long-loved music set,
Glory to Thee for all the grace
I have not tasted yet."

O tried and suffering heart, I pray you make the one effort for yourself! We can preach to you, pray for you, read to you God's precious promises; but one thing is needed—an effort by yourself! God's arms are open wide. God's love is flowing free. Christ's promises stand true. The Holy Spirit the Comforter is come. But you must do the rest yourself. Rouse you to an effort of will. Throw yourself upon this protecting love. Claim the promises. Come to the Father-heart that is beating for you. And in the hour of sore trial and bitter grief make your own the splendours of this glorious text, "Thou art a God that seeth."

But now, turning to the text again, we must not fail to notice the element of surprise in it. And not surprise only that God should be near, a present Helper, but surprise that He should be, seeing that He has not been appealed to nor looked for, has come unprayed for and unsought.

That Hagar should be surprised is natural enough—the poor girl, the poor slave-girl, betrayed and abandoned—what could she know of the love of God? But this is God's way in history, God's way with nations, with His Church, with the souls that trust Him. Why should we be surprised? When Abraham, grossly misunderstanding the meaning and spirit of sacrifice, was about to imitate the blood-sacrifices of the heathens and put the knife to his son's throat, a voice from heaven arrested his hand, and the son who was all but dead was alive again! And Jacob

in his old age voices the supreme surprise of souls on whom the unexpected has broken in blessing: "I had not thought to see thy face, and behold, God hath let me see thy seed also." These stories forever repeat themselves. We ought to learn their lesson. For this is a great Gospel that I am trying to preach to you, so great that its living greatness may be hidden in the simple words in which I am preaching it. The unthoughtful might think it greater if offered in polysyllabic and sonorous sentences, with stifling show of learning. It is the Gospel of the Living God, a God that looks upon us to help us from day to day and from hour to hour of our life. It is a Gospel of faith in the future on the sole ground that God is shaping the future according to His love. Wherefore, I would have you trust the unknown. Believe in what is not yet but is to be.

Look for the unlooked for. Expect the unexpected. Do not stand shivering with fear, dreading the trouble which is to come. The greatest troubles in life are those which never happen. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." By His help will we pluck safety from the nettle danger, change defeat into victory, distil blessing from our darkest woes, and transfigure the threat and terror of a night of sorrow with the golden glory of the dawn.

It is one of the commonplaces of life that sickness and adversity bring us unexpected gain.

There is heart-felt appreciation of the sympathy and kindness shown to us. These days or months of weakness have been days of revelation. Hands that have touched us have been softer, voices that have spoken to us have been gentler and sweeter, eyes

that have looked down upon us as we lay have shone with a sweetness not perceived before. People have seemed to think such kind thoughts of us, to send such kind messages, to burden themselves so kindly with our distresses, and minister to us with such tender anxiety, that when we come out into the world again it is with a kind of wonder articulating itself in our consciousness that there are so many nice and good people in the world!

There is a new tenderness in our own nature. We have laid down our weapons of offence and defence. We have abandoned our old self-regarding attitude. The hardness which has insensibly fastened upon us through our conflicts with the world slowly melts and leaves us unsophisticated, simple souls, at one with our kind.

There is a realisation of identification with God. Alone, with our pain

or weakness, we have not been alone. God was near. The silence was broken by His voice: we heard His compassionate words. The long, weary hours of the day and the longer, wearier hours of the night, were lit up and cheered and brightened by His smile. We knew that the Eternal God was our dwelling-place. We felt underneath the Everlasting Arms. Robert Louis Stevenson early rebelled at the thought of the piled up suffering of the world. Yet he became a great sufferer, glowed at the thought of God's fatherly dealings with him in his weakness, and wrote, "If you are sure that God in the long run means kindness to you, you should be happy." The tiny volume of prayers which he has left us shows that he had become sure of it himself, and was happy.

These are commonplace observations. Yet no individual seems to be

able to appropriate the experience of another, and no generation to live by the faith of one that has gone. Each person must find this out for himself, and to each it comes with the surprise of this text. Yet to each one of us the end comes. Sickness ends at last in death. And what then of our baffled hopes and broken purposes? What of our dreams unrealised, and the blank, the sense of an infinite distance and an irreparable loss, for which there is no equal word? Brethren, let us grapple with this question. Let us not shrink from it. If our religion dares not to face the problem, if it has no answer to give, if we are to walk softly all our lives under the threat and the terror of death, then is our faith vain and we are of all men most miserable. For myself, I hold that here the faith of Christ wins its most glorious victories, and in the presence of

death it shines with the radiance of immortality. I am prepared for surprises, when Death releases the Me which is indeed Myself from this sadly unsatisfactory body through which I have had to manifest myself hitherto. But that Death ends all is a proposition to me unthinkable. The author of "The Unrealised Logic of Religion" has reminded us that "A microscopic speck of radium, it is computed, is capable of sending out a stream of fiery particles for thirty thousand years. A needle dipped into a solution of radium nitrate, when viewed through a microscope, and set opposite a phosphorescent screen, will turn the screen into a target for successive jets of tiny stars, and the surface of the screen will be broken into minute crystals by the stream of particles which rush on it from the needle. A radium electroscope has been designed which is cal-

culated to go on automatically ringing a bell for thirty thousand years." And he has asked, "Now, if God has hidden in the tiny curve of an almost invisible speck of radium a physical energy so tremendous, an energy whose pulses will beat through tens of thousands of years, what possibilities of sustained energy has He not hidden in the Spirit of His child! Is He mightier in the atom than in the human spirit?"

Belief in immortality is easy compared with the contemplation of miracles like these. Death, surely, is no more than an incident of experience as natural as birth, an entrance into another life as birth was into this. And I declare that after my experience of God's leading, as I look back over the vicissitudes of life and see God working through them all, forcing me against my will and in spite of my judgment

to walk in strange paths, and perpetually surprising me by the knowledge that through all He was leading me on, to me the one great surprise of Death would be if I did not find it the grandest and most entrancing surprise of all!

The power to believe seems to come usually late in life. I beg you to observe this, and some of the implications of it. If this be a fact of general, though not universal, experience, you may be sure there is a meaning in it. Youth is a time of resoluteness, independence, vigour. Why should we then ask God's help, God's guidance, God's care? Are we not sufficient unto ourselves? Do we not hold the whole world in our strong right hand, and shall not our energy and will avail for every need and every effort and every victory over men and things? But this does not last forever! Soon,

oh, how soon! we find that our strength is utter feebleness. We are not big enough nor brave enough for such a world as this. Then, as the knowledge of our dependence comes to us, and coming, brings us pain, and as we realise the need, our confidence in the great Eternal Somewhat on whom we may depend, takes form and strength. We know God now! We know Him better! This is one of the surprises of God's guidance, and of His goodness. It is a compensation for the loss of much we valued and which served us well. It is a proof added on to all that God is, that He is Love, and ever mindful of His own. The changes of life seem to leave us poorer, and, without the sustaining faith of a Christian, will leave us sadder. The years fly. Our strength fails. Our friends pass away into the silence and darkness. We dwell amongst shadows.

Yet let us but be possessed by this confidence in a God who guides and keeps, and rules all in love, and we shall feel that every day is the best day, very sure that to-morrow will be better than to-day. The unavoidable calamities of life we shall heroically endure. In the darkest hour of trial or loss we shall walk in the light of God's love. Passing through the valley of weeping we shall make it a place of springs. This old earth will seem to us a cheerier place, ante-chamber of the many mansions where His saved ones dwell. And though a sorrow's crown of sorrow be remembering happier things, yet touched by an eternal hope it shall shine forth a fadeless crown of gold. For in this measureless universe, whose builder and maker is God, in this universe of tears and joy and death and children's laughter, there is no remotest spot where the believing

soul may not proclaim its triumph over man's mortality in the slave-girl's glad surprise, "Thou art a God that seeth."

WITH CHRIST AT HOME

"Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever."—Mark 1, 30.

THE significance of this incident for us will be found when we have noted its exact position, in point of time, in the life of our Lord.

Jesus knew Himself to be the Christ. He had entered upon His public ministry. He had been baptised in Jordan, and as He came forth from the baptismal waters He had heard a voice from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." He had been driven by the Spirit that possessed Him utterly into the wilderness, and there, through the long "temptation" of the

forty days, had determined His course, had thought out the first steps of the Path of Sorrows that ultimately brought Him to the Cross. He had preached the gospel of God in Galilee. He had attracted to Himself young men who were to be in after life His gifted apostles, to bear His word to all ends of the earth, to live and die for Him.

Having gathered around Him some of the ardent souls who were to form this apostolate, the evangelist Mark represents Him as entering into the Synagogue and teaching the people. This is His first announcement of Himself after the "call" to His Disciples. It may be said to be His earliest official utterance. And His first work, after this proclamation of Himself to the Church of His day, is a simple act of kindness to one of His chosen friends in the privacy of that friend's own home.

To many of us, the thought of the religion of Jesus as a universal religion brings an irresistible charm. We would exhaust language, if we could, in telling out the glory of the empire of Jesus Christ. His faith is for all men, all nations, all ages. The one Imperialism for which its purest citizen need not blush, which can transform its meanest into priest, or saint, or king, is that which owns the Son of Man as King of kings and Lord of lords. And this all-commanding, all-comprehending hope, as wide as the need of man, as strong as the love of God, incarnate in the only-begotten Son of the Father, steps forth into the large arena of its world-wide activities —to heal a sick woman who happens to be the mother-in-law of one of Christ's particular friends.

Does not the incongruity of that strike you? Do you not feel that it is

an anti-climax? Do you not want to see Christianity start upon its career of world-conquest in mood more grandiose, with more magnificent display than this?

Yet, no; for the life of Christianity is here! And I beg you to believe, dear friends, that you cannot go with Christ to the conquest of the world until you first have been with Christ at home. He shall be the Christ of our city, and we will make of New York or London, of Paris or Pekin, a city of God. He shall be *Christus Imperator*, and we will follow Him, conquering and still to conquer, till we put all His enemies—evil principles and evil tendencies—under His feet, and the kingdoms of Art, Science, Literature, Industry, Commerce, Politics, all, all shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ; but only on condition that we have first

given Him place by our fireside, and when the world is shut out, with wife and children round us, there in our own homes have begun to make our common daily life divine.

Such a reflection as this serves admirably for the correction of extravagant and unreal professions. Christianity rejoices in sentiment; owns it, works by it, blesses it. But there is a current sentimentality on which our religion can do no other than fling scorn. It is rhapsodic. It runs away with you. It is rhetorical. But it is not real. "Let us not put rhetoric into our lives," sharply suggests an English preacher, a friend of mine; "and then we may leave our speech to take care of itself. Our vocabulary is often so much larger than our actions. We talk dictionary, but we act drivel. We discourse in polysyllables, but we live A.B.C. Man's first

speech was signs. And now his best speech is in his deeds."

Doubtless Mrs. Jellyby is present with us this morning. She is very welcome. She attends most of the Churches with which I am acquainted. You have not forgotten Mrs. Jellyby? She was the lady in *Bleak House* who carried Africa in her eye. She was busy making flannel waistcoats for the Hottentots and moral pocket handkerchiefs for the South Sea Islanders. She was deeply concerned for the spiritual condition of the natives of Borrioboolah Gha. Her children were unclothed, unfed, unwashed, and her home was a scandal. Still, she always carried Africa in her eye.

Now, we shall get to all this, rationally, with conviction, and with devotion. All the world was John Wesley's parish, and it will be ours some day. Wherever there is wrong to redress,

sorrow to relieve, crushed humanity to lift up to God, there shall we be in the potent beneficence of our sympathy, our deeds, or our prayers. But first things come first. And first things must be kept first. Our "sphere of influence" will one day be wide enough even for the divine compassion of a Wesley or a Booth. But each man's first sphere of influence is the circle of his home.

This is the real test of goodness. What a bitter sneer that is, and how often deserved, "Saint at church and devil at home!" Here is a man you know. The crowd applauds him. His city crowns him. But his children curse him. Here is another. The Church of which he is a pillar delights to do him honour. But his wife—were it not for the amazing, long-suffering patience of wives which has so often made men of us—his wife

would despise him. And, on the other hand, can we say anything sweeter, better, about any man than we say of this other: "But you do not know him at all until you know him well. You ought to see him in his private life. Then you could see how *great* the *good* man is. You should see him there to know what goodness is!" In the presence of this one you say what Lowell said of Lamartine,

> "I but looked upward with the rest,
> And when they shouted 'Greatest,' whispered 'Best.'"

And if the home supplies the test of goodness, not less does it supply the discipline of character. It is not even certain that a happy home is not as fitted to be the training ground of high morality, of self-restraint, and growth in grace, as the home which is no home at all, and where each day's existence is a martyrdom. For we are tried by the love, by the gentleness,

by the self-sacrifice of our dearest. It is easy to take the devotion of those who love us as a matter of course, and to grow calmly selfish in our obtuseness. We are so used to the patient, uncomplaining slavery of those who find their delight in ministering to our comfort, that we accept it as a common thing, for which a smile or a look of gratitude would be absurdly out of place. Yet the wife's inexhaustible love, the husband's strong, protective passion, the mother's tenderness, the father's care, cannot be and must not be a matter of course to any good and generous heart. There is something woeful, tragic, in the way in which deeply religious people can afflict their nearest and dearest. In "Helbeck of Bannisdale," Mrs. Humphry Ward has brought before us just one phase of this. The anger of Laura Fountain blazes against some St. Francis Borgia,

of whom she has been reading in the Catholic books. His wife, it appears, was very ill, and he was praying for her. And as he prayed, he heard a voice, "If thou wouldst have the life of the duchess prolonged, it shall be granted; but it is not expedient for thee." For "*thee*," mind you, not for her. Sickness or health, life or death, did not concern the sick and dying woman, but only her husband. And when Francis heard this he was "penetrated by a most tender love of God, and burst into tears." Then he asked God to do as He pleased with the lives of his children and himself. He gave up praying for her. She grew worse. She died. In the space of three years, Laura reads, he disposed somehow of his eight children! Then he took the vows, became a Jesuit, and a saint! And Laura Fountain says that she feels like Iván Ivánovitch, the man with

the axe in Browning's poem, who killed an unnatural mother who had flung her children to the wolves to save herself. Laura longs for the axe, to drop it on the neck of this saint while he is saying his prayers, and enjoying his penetrating love and bursting into tears, and all the rest of it. She would like to see the saint in the grip of Iván Ivánovitch!

But on these terms, would not many of us merit the axe?

How calmly we assume that what is "expedient" for us is the sole consideration! And in the homes of religious people, wife and children are as indisputably sacrificed to that sole consideration as ever were wife and children in the Catholic legend. O men, in the name of our manhood, shall we not cease to presume upon the devotion of those who love us? It is no answer to the charge of carelessness, of callous-

ness, of cowardice, to say that they glory in such patient service. That may be true. And we, too, may glory in the love from which it springs. But if there is no answering, devoted love from us, their glory is our shame.

We have failed to build the perfect home. We have failed when we might have succeeded. We have failed, not from scantiness of material resources, but because of personal weakness and fault. We have failed because of defects we could have cured. The ideal Home is a world in itself. Within, while all the world rages, reigns a perfect peace. Those are noble words of John Ruskin:—

"This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far

as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of the outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods, before whose faces none may come but those whom they can receive with love,—so far as it is this, and roof and fire are types only of a nobler shade and light,—shade as of the rock in a weary land, and light as of the Pharos in the stormy sea;—so far it vindicates the name, and fulfils the praise, of Home."

Christianity is the extension and the elevation of the idea of the Home. It is the elevation of that which is already

high. It is sublimity for an idea already noble.

We have little record of the actual home life of Jesus in His boyhood and young manhood. And in the years of public ministry there was no home for Him, save in the hearts of those who loved Him. The foxes had their holes, the birds of the air had their nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. Yet the glimpses which we are permitted to catch of Him in domestic scenes bring us ideal visions of what it would be to be with Christ at home.

It is pleasant to think how little children loved him. Many years ago, on the occasion of my first visit to Liverpool, a good old man who is now dead, took me to the art gallery. There was a picture on exhibition which appealed powerfully to my uncultivated imagination and which I

have never forgotten. I do not know the name of the artist. I do not know what has become of the painting. I have not seen it since. But I can see it now. It was the picture of Christ, but such a Christ! Such a Christ as you have never seen on canvas. No effeminate pietist with his head on one side, but a great, splendid, broad-shouldered hero. Some children were clustered round His knees, but one was in His arms. He was tossing her up above His head, and she was laughing into His eyes that smiled again. The disciples stood about, looking properly scandalised, to be sure; though the women looked and laughed, as women would. And underneath was written, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." I exclaimed in admiration and delight; and the old gentleman with me said, "Oh, very

prosaic — common — wretchedly profane!" Yes; I don't doubt it! As common as an infant's smile. As prosaic as a mother's pity. As "profane" as the love of God shed abroad in human hearts. But the author of the *Imago Christi* has suggested that when Christ spoke those words, "Suffer the little children and forbid them not," He converted the home into a Church and parents into His ministers, and perhaps by this means won to Himself as many disciples in the course of the ages as even by the institution of the Church itself.

And in another way it is as beautiful, though so terrible, so tragic, to think of Him upon the Cross, suffering the incredible tortures which that ghastly form of punishment accumulates upon its victims, when the horror of great darkness was gathering upon Him so that in His soul was rising the

agonising cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" yet turning a last look of love upon the mother who bore Him, and praying His friend John to take her to His home and be a son to her whose Son had died upon the Tree.

If we could have the Christ of God a member of our home-circle, to sit at the table with us, and talk to us by our fireside, if in very truth He had "come not to sojourn but abide" with us, no matter how the tempest raged outside, nor what troubles pursued us to our door, once across the threshold we should need no more to sigh, "Heaven is our home," for Home would be our Heaven.

But Christianity is more than the elevation of this sublime conception of the Home. It is the extension of it. And that is immeasurably important.

You know how civilisation has pro-

ceeded. First the family. Then the tribe. Then the nation. It has seemed to halt there. And in any age there are people who think that the point which civilisation has at the moment reached is its final goal. Men think so now, and scoff at brave, prophetic hopes. But God has not spoken His last word to this generation. He has not exhausted His grace in the days that are gone. Civilisation, which has moved from the family to the tribe, from the tribe to the nation, must still move on, from nationalism to internationalism, from internationalism to humanism, which is Brotherhood, until too far east is west.

> "And after last comes round the first,
> Though a wide compass round be fetched;"

and the Race comes round to its starting point, the Family, with this essential and eternal difference, that the Family has become the Race and the

Race the Family, and all earth's children love one another—for the love of Christ constraineth them.

No step which remains to be taken is more impossible than the successive steps which the Race has made. What has been accomplished was "impossible." Impossible, but it was done! And future progress, so great, so wonderful, may be equally impossible; but it is equally certain that it will be won.

And yet it can be admitted that the difficulties are tremendous—the difficulties of bringing man to man together in bonds so close and secret as those of family life. Even good men, whose lives are a continuous worship of humanity, who pour out their lives for some sacred cause, often shrink from close association with individuals whom, in the mass, they live to help and save. They love Man, but they

do not like men! This is not hypocrisy. Such men are not hypocrites. Barriers are erected between man and man which individual temperaments find impassable.

Social differences separate us. This is not to say that social differences are divine and final. It is not to bring back the degrading "touch-your-hat-to-the-squire" clauses of the Church Catechism, with the injunction to carry yourself reverently in the presence of your betters—before you have found out who your betters are. It is only to say that as a matter of fact those social differences do here and now exist, and that they constitute a barrier which most of us find it difficult to cross—either from the one side or the other.

Education separates us. It is not necessary to postulate either pedantry and snobbishness on the one hand or

vulgarity on the other. It is only necessary to recognise that the educated man and the uneducated man each occupies his own circle, and that while undoubtedly the circles touch, none the less there is a vast division of each circumference into which the other life never comes.

Taste and the habits of every day separate us. These habits are not as the laws of the Medes and Persians, but they tend to permanence even in strong natures, while with weak ones they become as fetters of steel.

These and other similar facts and forces tend to keep us apart from each other, even when there is no selfishness, no hostility, no hate to divide us. So obvious is all this that Tolstoi, with his genius for taking up a question at the wrong end and for reading the facts of life backward, thinks that Education, Refinement, and Cleanliness

obstruct the free communion of man with man, and seems to propose that we should level all barriers by remaining, all of us, ignorant, boorish, and unclean.

How does Christianity propose to bind man to man in bonds as strong and close as those of the Home?

Jesus thought that it would not only be possible, but easy, if each man was first linked on to Himself. He would have us first brothers with Himself, and He would give to our family affection a deepened and strengthened emotion. Then, as each one of us is brother with Him, in due time we shall come to feel ourselves brothers with our brothers, first near and then far. "Blood is thicker than water," and that means something. There is something in the fact of brotherhood which you cannot explain—and cannot explain away. It is by no more

than accident that this man is your brother. You did not choose him. Indeed, if you had been consulted about the matter, he is far from the brother that you would have had! But he is your brother; that fact is indisputable and indestructible. You are not proud of the relation. But it is there. And just as surely as need arises, just as certainly as he is in trouble and you are in a position to help him, so imperiously does this fact of brotherhood assert itself, and either you long to prove your brotherhood by brotherly service, or you have to stifle the reproaches of your conscience by deliberate intention.

As we draw near to Christ, and walk with Him and talk with Him, we shall come to feel the sacredness of this tie, binding us to a wider circle than that of blood relationship. Insensibly there will grow upon us—it will not

be born into vigorous manhood; it will have to grow—a feeling for those beyond. And just in proportion as our love for Christ is deep and passionate and strong, in that proportion we shall find ourselves drawn with direct and personal pity, respect, or love, to the individuals of the Family for whom He died.

We shall know that we have passed from death into life when we love the brethren—and our brethren shall be all the children of God! We are one body, and there is going to be one heart to the globe. When a man feels this, he has entered into bliss. When the Race comes to feel it, lo, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! Joy is no joy to me unless I share it. I double my happiness when I divide it. And when it reaches out to all mankind, it has become for me quite infinite.

"I learned it in the meadow path,
  I learned it on the mountain stairs,
The best things any mortal hath
  Are those which every mortal shares.

The air we breathe, the sky, the breeze,
  The light without us and within,
Life with its unlocked treasures,
  God's riches—are for all to win.

The grass is softer to my tread,
  For rest it yields unnumbered feet;
Sweeter to me the wild rose red,
  Because she makes the whole world sweet.

Into your heavenly loneliness
  Ye welcome me, O solemn peaks!
And me in every guest ye bless
  Who reverently your mystery seeks.

And up the radiant peopled way
  That opens into worlds unknown,
It will be life's delight to say,
  'Heaven is not heaven for me alone.'"

This is the blessing with which Christ blesses me. He binds me to my brother everywhere, by binding me to Himself for evermore.

THE REPROACH OF THE GLAD NEW MORNING

"And He said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"—Luke 24: 25.

THEY were in the mood of those who say "It is too good to be true." Dearly they had loved their Lord. Faithfully they had followed Him. For His sake they had left all. In His name they had dared all. Yes, and they had trusted that it was He who should redeem Israel. But they had seen Him yield Himself, a dumb and stricken prisoner, before Pilate's judgment seat. In the moment of arrest they had surely thought that He would pray His

Father, and He should send twelve legions of angels to defend Him and bring His mighty Kingdom in. They had seen Him meekly bear the shameful blows, the buffetings, the infamous spitting, when they looked for Him to snatch the living lightning from the skies and blast a sacrilegious race. When they saw the scarlet robe, the thorn-crown, and the cross, then they veiled their eyes in utter shame and fled into the distracted night. It was now the third day since these things came to pass. Moreover, certain women of their company had amazed them, having been early at His tomb; for they came saying that they had seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. And some of them had so far taken heart of hope again that they, too, had been to the grave, and they found not His body there. Yet, though they listened to the stories the

women told—the good women whose hearts could see—they knew too well how such emotions, bitter-sweet, could lead imagination captive. 'Twas but a fond hallucination and a theme for tears. "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"

"Too good to be true?" Why, even then, their hearts burned within them as He talked with them by the way. Their wildest dreams were poor, their brightest hopes were tame and timorous things, compared to the living Reality which walked by their side. What went they out for to see in those days they had left behind them? A prophet, even the looked-for Messiah-king? Well, they had seen Him perish. The shadow of death enfolded Him, as darkness fell upon the sacred city and on them. But behold, He has vanquished darkness and the pow-

ers of the grave! "He has smitten with His thunder all the gates of brass asunder; He has burst the iron fetters, irresistible to save." He is clothed with light as with a garment. He has brought immortality to men. He comes in the might of omnipotence. In His pierced hands He holds the keys of morning and of everlasting life. For them, for us, for empires and centuries, and for the ages of the ages, He is more masterful and full of life than when He lived indeed!

"Too good to be true? I will not believe," says Sir Oliver Lodge, "that it is given to man to think out a clear and consistent system higher and nobler than the real truth. Our highest thoughts are likely to be nearest to reality." But you are afraid of imagination. It is a vain thing, and must be yoked with a servile mass of matter, or it may soar upward into the blue

sky, above the mountain tops, onward toward the glorious sun until it even approaches eternal light and the eternal truth of God! You are afraid of your own deep thoughts of the infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed. You are afraid of your own prayers. You are afraid of the implication of what is best in your own soul. Or you, too, would refuse to believe that it is given to man to have thoughts higher and nobler than the real truth of things. "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think"—! He is God. He is the Father-God, the Mother-God, the God of the buttercups and the daisies, of sunshine and spring, the God who cares for the sparrows and clothes the lilies, and spreads out the heavens as a curtain and calls all the stars by name, and longs for you as the child of His

heart, and loves you with an everlasting love so that sin and death and hell cannot separate you from the might of His affection nor quench His eternal hope for you! Can you think these things? Can they be conceived by your imagination? Could you ask this of the universe had the universe a soul to respond? Then "above," "abundantly above," "exceeding abundantly above" all that you can ask and think—derives it not from what we have the likest God within the soul? "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"

Morning light shames are midnight fears. But what is the shame precisely? The real shame is that in the darkness we were not sure of the coming dawn. We ought to have known that after midnight comes the morning, and in the blackest night of the year kept

God's sunshine in our soul. Even if intuition and imagination and that temperamental, instinctive appreciation of approaching day which turns the wise man's eyes toward the east be denied us; if we be dull-witted men not to be rebuked for rejecting our own great visions because we never had a great vision to reject, even then we shall not escape condemnation. We were slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. And that is our reproach.

Do not narrow words which are very wide. Do not think of a prophet only as one who spoke beforehand the events which were to come to pass. Do not think only of the great old saints of Bible days. Bring into view all the idealists and the poets; the mystics who have followed an inner light; the men of faith who have seen a hand you could not see and heard a voice you could not hear; devout souls

who have waited for the consolation of Israel; young men who have seen visions and old men who have dreamed dreams; poets who have felt great truths and told them, and learned in suffering what they taught in song; seers and light-bringers of every race and nation, as well as the prophets who spoke of Christ, the apostles who witnessed concerning Him, and the martyrs who died for Him—these are the "prophets" who in every night of fear have bidden us look for the dawning of the morning. And our rejection of their word is our reproach. We fainted in the day of adversity—our strength indeed was small! But it was presumption as well as cowardice, it was the egotism which goes with little faith, which rejected the word of the Lord when they spoke it, held that fear was better than faith and courage weaker than doubt!

In the childhood of the race was it said that, though the heel of man should know the serpent's sting, yet the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Over the welter and waste of a ruined world hung the rainbow promise of hope. Amid the thunders of Sinai, when the mountains flowed down at the presence of the Lord, it was proclaimed that His mercy should reach unto the thousandth generation of them that loved Him and kept His commandments. Isaiah was sure that the solitary place would yet be glad, the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose, that the eyes of the blind should be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, that the lame man should leap as the hart and the tongue of the dumb sing. He saw that every valley should be exalted, every mountain and hill made low, that the crooked should be made straight, the rough places plain,

the glory of the Lord revealed, and all flesh see it together. Amos, a prophet of doom, saw and said that the waste cities should be built again, fields and vineyards and gardens planted whose harvest should be so bountiful that the ploughman would overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that bore the seed. Zachariah knew, when town and country lay desolate, that in Jerusalem should yet be found happy old men and women, every one leaning on a staff for very age, and the city full of boys and girls playing in its streets. While the last of the men of the old covenant saw as in the gloaming that soon was to arise the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings.

Shall we turn to men of another race and a lower inspiration? Must we tell ourselves again that our own myriad-minded Shakespeare knew that there was a soul of goodness in things evil,

and a Providence which shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will? That Milton would trust truth and falsehood to grapple, knowing that truth was never yet put to the worse in an open encounter? That his friend Cromwell was satisfied that man never mounted so high, nor travelled so fast, as when he knew not whither he was going, but trusted himself to God? That George Washington was content to erect a standard to which the wise and good might repair and leave the issue in the hands of God? That upon the most momentous act in this nation's history Abraham Lincoln could invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favour of Almighty God? Who knoweth not such things as these? And what need is there to speak over again the death-defying words of the Carlyles, Ruskins, Emersons, Tennysons, Brownings, Lowells, of all generations,

telling us with many voices, but with one unfaltering message, that when half-gods go the gods arrive, and bidding us greet the unseen with a cheer? Shall we not mount upward to the very source and centre of all joy, all daring, all heat, all light, all inspiration, and immortal faith? We will pass by the great Apostle who through the windows of a Roman prison saw at midnight the red beams of morning; and that other one who, amid a burning city and a tortured nation, looked through the portals of a new day upon a world in which there was no more crying, nor mourning, nor pain, where God had wiped the tears from every eye, and where there was no more death. We come to Him in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and hear Him declare, as the shadow of the Cross falls upon the souls of them that love Him, that He, if He be lifted up,

will draw all men unto Himself; and our hearts leap as at the trumpet of God when He bids us "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom!"

This is the testimony which we have rejected—"O fools, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"

It is with the heart that man believes unto righteousness. Problems are solved by emotion, not by criticism. It is the visionary who is the practical man, the enthusiast whose judgment is sound and true. Wisdom is always justified of her children, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Has it not been explained to us by the genial "Professor" at the breakfast table that there is such a thing as a reversed current in the flow of thought and emotion? The brain is the palest of all the internal organs, and the heart

the reddest. When the red heart sends all its instincts up to the white brain to be analysed, chilled, blanched, and made into pure reason, you are likely to make mistakes. The current should flow the other way. The white brain should send its clear thoughts to the red heart to be made instinct with "the hot aortic throb of human life." The worst of great thinkers, John Bright said grimly of John Stuart Mill, is that "they so often think wrong." But when the prophets in the midnight hours have bidden us look for the morning light they have had on their side the solid facts of history and the enduring truth of things. The doubters and the pessimists and the croakers were wrong. For as often as night has descended on our world, just as often has it been recorded that the dayspring from on high has visited us. Fear might have been forgiven to the mob

of oppressed and ignorant slaves pushing forward from a land of bondage toward the free airs of the desert, when they heard the roar of a pursuing army behind them, when the mountain fastnesses stretched on either hand, and before them rolled the sea. Still the command was in the air and in their hearts: "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward!" They had but to stand still and see the glory of the Lord. Doubt might have been forgiven to the patriot souls in exile who loved their native land so well that they hung their harps upon the willows and refused to sing the Lord's songs on a foreign soil. Yet the day came when they were to go out with joy and be led forth with peace, when the mountains and the hills broke forth before them into singing, and all the trees of the field clapped their hands. When in England the men who loved

liberty and God were driven from pillar to post, imprisoned, mutilated, and starved, devoured by Conventicle Acts, Five-Mile Acts, and Acts of Uniformity; when sixty thousand took joyfully the spoiling of their goods and many suffered even unto blood; when an English King sported with Nell Gwynne in the Palace at Whitehall what time John Bunyan lay in Bedford Jail; or later, when an Egyptian darkness which could be felt covered the land from north to south and east to west, when decency was laughed out of fashion and vice reigned supreme, when the evangelical religion had died out of the evangelical pulpit and an English Archbishop complimented an English Queen upon the complacency with which she regarded the infidelities of her husband the King; or when in this land the Continental forces sat at Valley Forge, cold,

hungry, ragged; when Benedict Arnold's treason hung as an impenetrable cloud over the souls of the patriots, and Lee's not less deadly treachery menaced the very existence of the army; when money was exhausted, mutiny threatened unknown calamities, and the politicians were impotent; or, later in your history when Lloyd Garrison was led through the streets of Boston with a rope round his neck; when in Concord, New Hampshire, the savage passions of the mob were roused against John Greenleaf Whittier, held up to opprobrium along with an English Member of Parliament, Charles Thompson, denounced as an infamous foreign scoundrel; when fugitive slaves were re-captured under the very shadow of the Capitol, and others were hidden by Henry Ward Beecher on the premises of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn; or, when a million

men, brothers in name and in speech linked by a thousand ties of interest and love, looked into each other's eyes through the blood-red haze of battle, and the country was torn with agony unspeakable; when Abraham Lincoln's hero life ended in a martyr's death—then it might have been forgiven to loyal hearts and true if they despaired of seeing the day of the vindication of their God. Yet God was not dead, nor was He sleeping, nor yet upon a journey. His arm was not shortened that He could not help. He sent His prophets forth again. He commanded light to shine out of darkness. In England John Wesley flings fire from heaven upon masses of his countrymen; the evangelical passion blazes through the land, and many a wrong and many a curse is swept away in the whirlwind of its flames. While in this land a mighty voice goes pealing forth: "The

Lord reigneth and the government of Washington stands!" Over this vast continent is found one people, one nation, one flag, and everywhere there beats the pulse of one fraternity.

We ought to remember these things. We ought to remember them, and be very brave and ever hopeful during any time of moral depression through which we have to pass. Not less ought we to remember these things and be brave and hopeful in the hour of material depression, anxiety, and loss. We ought to remember them through all the days and all the hours of darkness which may await us in the course of our changeful life. For these are the things by which man lives. I do not wonder at what men suffer; I wonder at what men lose. Fools, and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken, our unbelief has its Nemesis. And the worst of the judgment upon our doubt

is that in our own souls we know we ought to have believed. We take shame to ourselves for our own unfaith. We might have been cheerful and happy through all. We might have given to our friends and neighbours and to our world a high example of radiant courage through all the circumstances of defeat and bafflement. We might have been a well-spring of faith and courage for all who came to us weary by the way. We could have planned and worked, laying foundations on which we might afterwards build, bearing all things, hoping all things, attempting great things for God, expecting great things from God. We know now that we were not true to our own best and deepest selves. We did not believe in ourselves enough. We did not believe hard enough in our own principles. Our faith had not been burnt into us deep enough. Faith in

humanity, in liberty, in everlasting righteousness, in God, and Christ, and Calvary, and the Open Grave, and Immortality, is not hung upon some vaticination of the Weather Bureau. We ought to be more splendid, more audacious, more defiant in our living faith. We ought to stand for Liberty, though Freedom's friends be few. We ought to defend the right when right is miscalled wrong. We ought to be true to the Prince of Peace though all our world go mad for war. Surely it is written in the heavens for us: "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you!"

So then this is the lesson for your daily life. Will you confront the dis-

appointment, the darkness, the sorrow, which may be waiting for you in the home to-day or at business to-morrow, or in your wide or narrow world, with the calm and happy courage of one who knows that all things work together for good to them who love God? No two nervous temperaments are alike. No two sets of circumstances are the same. Our needs are different as our voices are. Sunshine and shadow, shadow and sunshine, make up the twenty-four hours of our day. And while one of us is rejoicing with joy unspeakable in the sunshine which is flooding his soul, his neighbour is yet groping in the darkness, fearing the light, wearing a smile only to conceal his tears, and dreading the shadow which lengthens to the night. Dear brother, dear sister, believe in God! Believe in His love. Believe in His care. Believe in His goodness. Be-

lieve that He knows, and that all is well with you since you are in His hands. Believe that pain is not all painful, that chastisement may be sweet, that bodily weakness, hardship, loss, the blight of hope, and all that seems most wrong, may in some strange, sad, yet splendid way, minister to your highest and eternal good. Call to Him, then, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet! Every night has worn at last to morning. Soon your long night of sorrow will be ended. Look, the east is already flushed with the promise of the day! "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God!" Foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me.

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